
The White Tiger: A Literary Representation of Ecological Decay and Disaster

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Article Received: 12/05/2025**Article Accepted:** 14/06/2025**Published Online:** 16/06/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.18.06.347

Abstract: Be it exponential growth of industry, be it making of sky kissing high rise, be it rapid urbanization of small towns; everything comes from the exploitation of something. This paper examines how all these are the results of man's insatiable greed and money mongering mindset resulting an unprecedented ecological disaster; the repercussion of which is excruciatingly cataclysmic and nerve wracking. In my research, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is analysed as a sharp critique of modern India's class system, economic inequality and disparity, moral decay and hypocrisy. However, by applying the concept of political ecocriticism, we can deepen our understanding of how the novel reflects the irreparable environmental degradation and how the existing political power endorse that degradation to gain their own profit by means of exploitation of the underprivileged. People since time immemorial, are so busy fulfilling their material needs that they do not have even time to think of the boomerang effect of contaminating natural resources to gratify their own needs. The crying need of the hour, however, is to build a future that strikes a viable equilibrium between man and his surroundings, to live in harmony with his environment. For long man's attitude to nature had been based on master/ slave theory. Man for centuries had been the master of all that he surveyed, believed in the existence of Nature for the purpose of his sole utilization. Therefore he endeavoured upon its exploitation. The modern man is facing ecological disasters; most of which are manmade disasters like precipitous growth of technology, water pollution, vehicular pollution mostly in cities, air pollution, and explosion of population and depletion of valuable natural resources. Indian writers have addressed these alarming issues to endorse consciousness amongst the citizens to keep their planet sustainable. Writer like Aravind Adiga has performed a significant role in arousing environmental and ecocritical concerns through his literary creation.

Key Words: Ecocriticism, Environment, Ecological Disaster, Politics, Eco crime.

Introduction: Though the nature is the central theme of all ecocritical works, all nature writings are not considered as ecocritical. But the human association, with the physical world and environment, forms the basis of ecocritical texts. Ecocriticism not only studies the literature in its ecological concerns but also it studies environment from interdisciplinary

points of view. It is the moral responsibility and accountability on the part of every human to safeguard our environment, as it is increasingly becoming a threatened environment for each and all of its members, human or nonhuman, where each requires in its own space to be. The crying need of the hour is to build a future that strikes a balance between man and his surroundings, to live in harmony with his environment. For long man's attitude to nature had been based on master/ slave theory. Man for centuries had been the master of all that he surveyed, believed in the existence of Nature for the purpose of his sole utilization. Therefore he endeavoured upon its exploitation. The modern man is facing ecological disasters. Ecological disasters are manmade disasters like nuclear wars, precipitous growth of exploitative technology, water pollution, air pollution, and excessive growth of population and depletion of valuable natural resources. In this context Eco criticism is born as literary theory in the twenty first century. In the book *The Environmental Imagination* eco-criticism has been defined as: "*a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist's praxis*" (Buell-p-430). Eco criticism, in the literature, studies the relation between man and nature especially with physical environment. It focuses on the green issues the present world is facing. "*The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between human and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other*" (Frederick p-147)

Ecocriticism is relatively a recent addition to the field of exploration which compels to look at literary studies through an ecocritical lens. The recent trend in the field of criticism is ecocriticism which emerged late in nineteenth and early twentieth century in USA and UK. Romantic poets like William Wordsworth, John Keats, S.T. Coleridge and American writers like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson described the beauty of nature. Most of them personified nature as a goddess. Lawrence Coupe's *The Green Studies Readers* is a far reaching choice of basic writings which tends to the association between environment, culture, and literature. To put it plainly, the book is a legitimate source and a valuable section into Green Literature as it gives an enormous measure of sources to be utilized for research. For the sake of industrialization and development, the modern man destroys the beauty of nature and degraded the environment. Beautiful environment is degraded because of air pollution, water pollution and population growth which resulted in slum colonies and sewages. The term 'ecocriticism' has been derived from 'criticism' and shortened form of 'ecology'; which means a scientific analysis and study of interactions amongst organisms and their environment. Basically, ecocriticism is the study of representation of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and environment.

Writer like Aravind Adiga has performed a significant role in arousing environmental and ecocritical concerns through his literary creation. Though the nature is the central theme of all ecocritical works, all nature writings are not considered as ecocritical. But the human association, with the physical world and environment, forms the basis of ecocritical texts. Ecocriticism not only studies the literature in its ecological concerns but

also it studies environment from interdisciplinary points of view. It talks about annihilation of the biological, physical environment, natural species and their extinction due to the urbanization and the industrialization. It raises environmental questions like the deforestation, pollution, natural degeneration and the environmental crisis to alert human mind. It also suggests possible solutions to major contemporary ecological issues.

In my research, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is analysed as a sharp critique of modern India's class system, economic inequality and disparity, moral decay and hypocrisy. However, by applying the concept of political ecocriticism, we can deepen our understanding of how the novel's first chapter reflects the irreparable environmental degradation and how the existing political power endorse that degradation to gain their own profit by means of exploitation of the underprivileged. It shows how power and politics are intimately connected. Political ecocriticism explores the intersections of environmental issues with systems of oppression, exposing how ecological exploitation reflects and reinforces inequalities based on class, caste, gender, and global capitalism.

Theorizing Ecocriticism: Ecocriticism emerged as a recognizable discipline within the literature in 1980s in the Western American Universities and in 1990s in the Britain. American and British Romantic writers took interest in nature as a subject. Further, Victorian realists wrote about industrialization and globalization that was altering the natural landscape. In USA ecocriticism was highly influenced by the writings of major nature poets and essayists like R. W. Emerson, H. D. Thoreau and Margaret Fuller. Emerson's *Nature* (1836) speaks about the impact of natural world upon him. He unfolds the spiritual unity of nature and urges his readers to enjoy a relationship with the environment. H. D. Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), a poetic narrative, describes his two years stay in a small wooden house. In this work, he encounters remarkable creatures and landscapes around him with microscopic details. Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lake* (1843) was a powerfully written journal of her encounter with the American landscapes. All these three books can be called the fundamental works of American eco-centered writings.

However, in the book entitled *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Lawrence Buell defines two waves of ecocriticism. According to him, the first wave of eco critics focused on genres like nature writing and wilderness fiction. They upheld the philosophy of organism. The second wave focused on social environmental issues such as degradation of landscapes, deforestation etc. Thus, ecocriticism is a multidimensional concern deeply embedded in the folds of ecological ethics. The first wave rooted in deep ecology enjoins nature preservation and protection. It advocated the static stability of nature and its dialectical relationship with man. It privileged the Universalist perception of nature and the focus on nature writing/non-fiction texts in the United States of America, which accounted for the narrowness of the phase. The perception of the environment beyond the "natural" consequent upon technological development and urbanization, thus, broadening the re-theorising of nature to incorporate vestiges of nature in cities and texts not necessarily interested in the natural environment set forth the phase of second wave.

Nature of Problems:

1. How does the writer look at the issues of environmental disaster and crises in a particular country?
2. Incorporation of new concepts like Political Ecology, Environmental literacy, Ecological Crisis, Environmental Injustice, Eco-anxiety etc.
3. To inquire all pervasive material forces and their increasingly destructive effects on human life.

The White Tiger, a novel by Aravind Adiga, explores the impact of environmental degradation on the characters and society as a whole. Degradation of land, population growth, increasing air pollution, depletion of water resources and the background of overwhelming poverty are some of the environmental issues depicted across the novel. Adiga's "The white tiger" mirrors most explicitly the state of India's environment at the hands of uncontrolled human activities, resulting in ecological ailments threatening both the development of India and the outlook for its future. In *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, there are several instances and themes that can be interpreted as examples of environmental injustice. Environmental injustice refers to the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens among different social groups, often based on factors such as race, class, or socioeconomic status. While the novel primarily focuses on broader societal and economic inequalities, there are moments that reflect the concept of environmental injustice.

Through an ecocritical lens, we can examine the portrayal of the environment and its relationship to power and oppression in the novel. In *The White Tiger*, the degradation of the natural environment is used as a metaphor for the decay of Indian society. The polluted air and water, the disappearing forests and wildlife, and the rampant industrialization all represent the corruption and moral decay that pervades the society in which Balram lives. *"To my left I saw the domes of the President's House-the place where all the important business of the country is done. When the air pollution is really bad, the building is completely blotted out from the road..."* (Page-134).

Scholars like Adiga, have managed essential issues relating to innovative and basic movements in the Indian-English circumstances. Issues like post-provincial migration, multi-cultural nativism and significance of social- political interaction are analysed with incredible significance and success. Indian authors confront and delineate the truth around these issues with adroitness and skill. Through Balram's journey from a poor rural village to a successful entrepreneur in the city, we see how the environment shapes his worldview and his actions. As he becomes more immersed in the corrupt system, he begins to see the environment as a resource to be exploited for his own gain, rather than a valuable and finite ecosystem. The degradation of the environment also has a direct impact on the characters in the novel. For example, Balram's family in the village is forced to drink polluted water, which leads to illness and death. Similarly, the disappearance of forests and wildlife threatens the livelihoods of those who depend on them for survival.

Furthermore, the environmental degradation perpetuates inequalities, class discrimination and reinforces power structures. Those in positions of power are able to exploit the environment for their own gain, while those who are marginalized and oppressed suffer the consequence. The novel depicts the exploitation of rural communities for the benefit of urban development. Balram Halwai, the protagonist, comes from a rural background and is exposed to the stark contrast between the underdeveloped villages and the rapidly growing urban centres. The novel touches on the issue of pollution and its impacts on the health and well-being of different social groups. In the city of Delhi, where Balram works, pollution levels are extremely high, leading to health problems for the poor residents who cannot afford medicines, proper protection or healthcare.

“Rush hour in Delhi. Cars, scooters, motorbikes, auto rickshaws, black taxis, jostling for space on the road. The pollution is so bad that the men on the motorbikes and scooters have a handkerchief wrapped around their faces-each times you stop at a red light, you see a row of men with black glasses and masks on their faces” (Page-133). As the novel portrays the rapid urbanization of Indian cities, it also hints at the displacement of poorer communities to make way for new development.

“I could see multitudes of small, then grimy people squatting, waiting for a bus to take them somewhere or with nowhere to go and about to unfurl a mattress and sleep right there. These poor bastards had come from Darkness to Delhi to find some light-but they were still in the darkness. Hundreds of them, there seemed to be, on either side of the traffic” (Page-158). While "The White Tiger" does not extensively explore environmental injustice, it does provide glimpses into how environmental disparities can intersect with broader social and economic inequalities

Political Ecology plays a pivotal role in this narrative. Political Ecology is an interdisciplinary field that examines the political and economic factors influencing the relationships between society and the environment. It exposes and scrutinizes how power dynamics, socio-economic structures, political perspectives shape environmental practices and environmental justice. Aravind Adiga intertwines themes of environmental degradation, industrial pollution, and human suffering, offering a poignant narrative that resonates with principles related to political ecology. The program or movement now being called political ecology appears to have emerged in reaction to certain features of human ecology or ecological anthropology as it was practiced in the 1960s and early 1970s. In particular, there was a reaction to the neglect of the political dimensions of human/environment interactions. Political ecology attempts to provide critiques as well as alternatives in the interplay of the environment and political, economic and social factors. Robbins (2005) asserts that the discipline has a normative understanding that there are very likely better, less coercive, less exploitative, and more sustainable ways of doing things.

From these assumptions, political ecology can be used to:

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- Inform policymakers and organisations of the complexities surrounding environment and development, thereby contributing to better **environmental governance**;
 - Understand the decisions that communities make about the natural environment in the context of their political environment, economic pressure, and societal regulations;
 - Look at how unequal relations in and among societies affect the natural environment, especially in context of government policy.

In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga illustrates this form of violence vividly in the rural village of **Laxmangarh**, where environmental degradation, poverty, and systemic exploitation quietly erode the lives of its inhabitants. While the novel doesn't describe an immediate physical violence in Laxmangarh, but it reveals how generations of villagers suffer under conditions that are structurally violent: polluted water, defunct infrastructure, inadequate healthcare, hunger, and denial of education. These slow-moving harms are **politically maintained and environmentally embedded**, making Laxmangarh a powerful example of **environmental injustice** and **slow violence**. The strong narrative power of literature is reflected through his writing. He has proved that literature is such a tool which can mirror the excruciating violence imposed on the marginalized class since time immemorial. In this context it is very relevant to quote Rob Nixon who has truly posed certain questions:

In an age when the media venerate the spectacular, when public policy is shaped primarily around perceived immediate need, a central question is strategic and representational: how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world? How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention, these emergencies whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time? (3)

Conclusion: Environmental security is inextricably linked to the overall development of a particular society. Poverty and environmental destruction go hand in hand. People badly need clean water, fertile land and resources for their daily survival. The life and culture of the people is intertwined with the land they live on. Destruction and contamination of that land directly leaves an impact on economy, culture, and the lives of the people. Thus, there is a need of paradigm shift from the anthropocentric to the eco centric set of values. The writer here has proposed inculcation of deep ecological vision and mass awareness about environmental justice issues as a solution to the ongoing ecological crisis. Thus, the research arrives at the conclusion that there is a crying need to preserve nature as humans are primary members of the natural world.

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